

## OUT OF THE PAST

The Burden of a Stranger

By GERSHOM BRADFORD

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"Hello, Tom," a simple greeting from a passing stranger. Tom Hanigan, standing in his yard by the roadside, responded promptly. "And who are you?" Without a turn of the head or change of gait, the traveler surprisingly replied, "used to see you in Liverpool." Tom's puzzled eyes followed the receding figure, a market basket on his arm, heading for Ford's store. He was young -- perhaps 32 or 33 years old, but walked like a man with a burden on his mind.

Yes, some 18 years before Tom Hanigan had been a boss stevedore on the docks at Liverpool. The meeting of these 2 men was a remarkable coincidence. Each had had many adventures in those 18 years. Quiet, rural Marshfield was far removed from Liverpool. Tom Hanigan was then living in the old Winslow house on Careswell St. Martin, Tom's son, told me this unusual incident years ago.

Who was the stranger? I thought it would be interesting to know and began gathering scraps of rumor, shored up by supporting facts to give integrity to my story.

When the French Cable landed at Rouses Hummock in July, 1869, a young man also came ashore. From the first, he was known as Captain Graffam. Melancholy and aloof, he made no friends, had no confidantes. He was humbly employed to tend the terminus of the sea cable in a building on the Hummock. There was something about Captain Graffam that won respect and carried the impression that he had been a man of parts - before something happened.

Just east of Green Harbor Village, at the edge of the marsh, there was a weathered building. I well recall its quaint sign. "Tom Pezzi, Forever." In the front room Pezzi sold fish and lobsters and in the rear, I was told, there was a gathering place for watermen and others, where hard news and loose rumor were exchanged. It was said that Captain Graffam used to frequent Pezzi's place, sitting aside silent and morose. One evening a lively discussion developed as to the method of finding the capacity of a barrel. The fishermen were getting nowhere when to their surprise, Captain Graffam broke his long silence explaining clearly and simply how the answer was obtained. The group was impressed.

Somehow the story became current that Captain Graffam had gone to sea at an early age, worked up the grades of mate and at last won the command of a fine ship. After several years a disaster, that can come to the best of seamen, overtook him and he lost his ship. Ship owners and insurance companies were intolerant of masters who lost or even grounded their ship regardless of the circumstances.

Those were the days when his ship was a master's life. Few inanimate things can so reach into a man's soul as his ship. To lose her was his ruin, professionally and mentally. They never fully recover. I have met several such broken men.

Who knew and let out the story of Captain Graffam? I can only guess: Richard Gaines came with the cable. He was the first superintendent at Duxbury. With little doubt, he hired Graffam before the cable ships sailed. So he must have known why Graffam was leaving England. Gaines could hardly have kept the story from his friends. His daughter, the late Mrs. J. H. Sanderson, in talking with me, remembered the Captain well and confirmed his superior qualities and unfortunate past.

Captain Graffam, after a few years, disappeared from Duxbury. Let us now move on to 1920. I was instructor in navigation at the U.S. Shipping Board School in Boston. There was a student from Plymouth, "Loney" Thomas, a chief mate, preparing to "sit" for his master's papers. He told me that he had received much help from an old man living alone somewhere back of Plymouth. I was interested. A few days later Thomas handed me a postal card, on the back of which it read, "Here is your problem." To the landsman it would appear an intricate trigonometrical calculation, but it was the daily rite of navigators the world over - finding the longitude of a ship at sea. This one was using a star in place of the sun. The problem was all on perfect order, figures all carefully formed.

It was signed, "Graffam."